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Tuesday, 31 January 2006, 10.20 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Mahiga	(United Republic of Tanzania)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Estrémé
	China	Mr. Li Junhua
	Congo	Mr. Ikounebe
	Denmark	Mr. Lee
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Greece	Mr. Vassilakis
	Japan	Mr. Oshima
	Peru	Mr. De Rivero
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Hader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Denisov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Sir Emyr Jones Parry
	United States of America	Mr. Bolton

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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06-22704 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs.

It is so decided.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Security Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear a briefing by Ms. Angela Kane, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Kane: There have been dramatic developments in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory this past month, including the serious illness of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the victory, just a few days ago, of the Change and Reform list of Hamas in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections.

The Quartet principals met last night in London. A new Palestinian Government has not yet been formed. In these circumstances, I am sure that the Council will understand if I confine myself to remarks that are brief and factual.

Let me turn first to Israeli political developments. Prime Minister Sharon suffered a significant stroke on 4 January. He remains in an extremely serious but stable condition in hospital in Jerusalem. The Secretary-General continues to hope for his recovery.

Vice-Prime Minister Ehud Olmert immediately took over as Acting Prime Minister, and was subsequently confirmed by the Knesset in that position on 16 January. Mr. Olmert has stated Israel's commitment to a resolution of the conflict in accordance with the road map, while leaving open the possibility of further unilateral measures in the West Bank.

I should like now to turn to Palestinian political developments. On 25 January, Palestinian Legislative Council elections were held throughout Gaza and the West Bank — including in East Jerusalem, after the Israeli Cabinet agreed to allow 6,300 of the approximately 120,000 eligible voters to vote in six post offices, consistent with the procedures set by the Oslo Accords and the 1996 and 2005 elections. Overall, 77 per cent of registered voters cast their votes for a new legislature.

The election was observed by approximately 26,000 national observers and 1,000 international observers, including missions from the European Union, the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Center and Canada. Overall, the observers concluded that the campaign took place in a relatively calm atmosphere, with an absence of provocative rhetoric. Israeli authorities generally eased travel through checkpoints to facilitate freedom of movement on election day, although candidates, campaign workers and election workers were at times unable to move satisfactorily through checkpoints during the campaign period.

The Secretary-General, who had issued a personal message of support to the Palestinian people prior to the election, telephoned Palestinian Authority President Abbas to congratulate him and the Palestinian people on this important milestone in the building of Palestinian democratic institutions.

In accordance with the official results announced by the Central Elections Commission, the Change and Reform list of Hamas won a majority consisting of 74 seats. The Fatah list won 45 seats, with the remaining 31 seats going to smaller parties and independents.

President Abbas indicated that he would immediately begin consultations on the establishment of a new Government. Referring to the obligations and responsibilities that will fall on it, the President cited

> "Palestinian-Israeli agreements, starting with the Oslo Accords and the Arab Summit resolutions and ending with the resolutions that have been agreed upon by the international community, in particular the road map as the sole framework that is being posed now for implementation".

Hamas leaders have expressed their wish to explore a Government in which Change and Reform works with other groups that represent the Palestinian

people. Consultations on the formation of a Government are continuing.

Let me turn now to the Quartet meeting in London. Last night, the Secretary-General met with his Quartet colleagues in London to discuss the political situation in the aftermath of the election, to address the urgent crisis of Palestinian finances and to consider the way forward on security-sector performance and reform. The Quartet was briefed by Quartet Special Envoy James Wolfensohn and United States Security Coordinator Keith Dayton. Former United States President Jimmy Carter also shared his impressions after having headed the recent electoral observer mission.

The Quartet congratulated the Palestinian people on an electoral process that was free, fair and secure. It welcomed President Abbas's affirmation that the Palestinian Authority is committed to the road map, previous agreements and obligations between the parties, and a negotiated two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Quartet expressed the view that all members of a future Palestinian Government must be committed to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map.

Mindful of the needs of the Palestinian people, the Quartet discussed the issue of assistance to the Palestinian Authority. First, the Quartet expressed its concern about the fiscal situation of the Palestinian Authority and urged measures to facilitate the work of the caretaker Government to stabilize public finances, taking into consideration established fiscal-accountability reform benchmarks. Secondly, the Quartet concluded that it was inevitable that future assistance to any new Government would be reviewed by donors against that Government's commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map.

Let me turn now to other issues. While the Palestinian Authority security forces helped to maintain order during the recent elections, there were numerous and varied serious security incidents during the reporting period, many in or emanating from the Gaza Strip. Those events underlined the need for the Palestinian Authority to ensure law and order and take action against terrorism, as reiterated by the Quartet last night. The events included kidnappings, attacks on official buildings and installations, breaches of the border between Gaza and Egypt, Qassam rocket fire into southern Israel and suicide bombings for which Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility.

Israel responded to terror attacks and the firing of rockets by tightening the closure regime, launching air strikes on areas in the Gaza Strip, conducting lethal ground operations in the West Bank and carrying out targeted killings. Barrier construction and land-levelling in occupied Palestinian territory continued in the reporting period, despite the ruling of the International Court of Justice. Earlier this month, the Israeli Defence Minister ordered that work be resumed on three sections of the barrier in Jerusalem, which had earlier been frozen following an order of the Israeli High Court of Justice. In addition, retroactive permits were issued for the construction of the Mod'in Illit settlement neighbourhood of Matityahu East, which is being built on land belonging to the Palestinian village of Bil'in.

At yesterday's meeting, the Quartet reiterated its view that settlement expansion must stop and its concerns about the route of the barrier. It also took note of Acting Prime Minister Olmert's recent statement that Israel will continue the process of removing unauthorized outposts.

The issuing of eviction notices by eight settler families living in the wholesalers' market in Hebron led the Israeli Defence Forces to declare the Jewish Quarter of Hebron a closed military zone on 16 January. That declaration was lifted three days later, after the settlers promised to maintain order. The security forces announced that the evacuation of the wholesale market in Hebron and the Amona settlement outpost would be deferred until after the Palestinian election.

I should like now to turn to Lebanon. In view of the recent report and briefing to the Council on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), I will not go into details of the situation along the Blue Line. Four Katyusha rockets were fired from Lebanon, of which three landed in the Galilee on 27 December, causing heavy property damage to one Kiryat Shmona apartment building. Israel reacted with restraint. There have been 17 Israeli air violations of the Blue Line since the last briefing. Lebanon has not reacted to any of those violations. In addition to UNIFIL's efforts on the ground, the Special Coordinator and the Personal

Representative of the Secretary-General for Lebanon have continued consultations in order to explore ways to reduce tension along the Blue Line.

Prime Minister Seniora has continued to bolster his efforts aimed at securing national unity. Discussions are taking place between various Lebanese parties to resolve the current differences among them. Positive moves have also been made towards initiating a national dialogue, the necessity of which has been accepted by all.

On 19 January, the new Commissioner of the United Nations International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIIC), Mr. Serge Brammertz, arrived in Lebanon to take up his new position. In accordance with Security Council resolution 1644 (2005), Mr. Brammertz will extend the Commission's technical assistance to the Lebanese authorities with regard to their investigations into the terrorist attacks that have taken place since 1 October 2004.

Mr. Nicolas Michel, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs, visited Beirut on 26 and 27 January 2006. The aim of the visit was to discuss with the Lebanese authorities the nature and scope of the international assistance needed for the establishment of a tribunal of an international character in keeping with the Council mandate in the Secretary-General's report (S/2005/783) and in resolution 1644 (2005). The meetings were constructive and fruitful, and Mr. Michel believes that there is a broad basis of support for the establishment of a tribunal of an international character. He expressed to the authorities his great appreciation for the positive atmosphere of the discussions and was encouraged by the general commitment demonstrated to move ahead. In the following days and weeks, the United Nations will continue to work closely with the Lebanese authorities on the matter.

Let me now conclude. As the Quartet reiterated last night, we must remain committed to the principles outlined in the road map and to a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The United Nations, through the Quartet and in close consultation with key regional actors, will continue to work tirelessly for that goal.

The President: I thank Mr. Kane for his briefing.

In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I should now like to invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.15 a.m.